

Stand Up for the Right to Vote

"It will come, but I shall not see it... It is inevitable. We can no more deny forever the right of self-government to one-half our people than we could keep the Negro forever in bondage. It will not be wrought by the same disrupting forces that freed the slave, but come it will, and I believe within a generation."

Susan B. Anthony
speaking about the vote for women

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex . . ."

19th Amendment



Does One Vote Really Matter?

Voter participation often suffers because of the generally accepted belief that one vote cannot make a difference. However, consider these facts:

- 1645, ONE VOTE gave control of England to Oliver Cromwell
- 1649, ONE VOTE approved the beheading of Charles I
- 1800, ONE VOTE prevented Aaron Burr from becoming the President of the U.S.
- 1850, ONE VOTE brought Texas into the United States
- 1868, ONE VOTE saved President Andrew Johnson from impeachment
- 1875, ONE VOTE ended the monarchy in France for a voting democracy
- 1920, ONE VOTE in the Tennessee legislature caused the ratification of the 19th Amendment
- 1960, ONE VOTE in each precinct elected John F. Kennedy

In colonial elections, only freeholders could vote: male property owners who were 21 years old and, in many places, the voter also had to be Protestant.

The privilege of voting is a basic right and responsibility of U.S. citizenship, yet it took 200 years before the words "We the People" came to include all Americans. Participants in the *Stand Up for the Right to Vote* program at The American Village take that journey over two centuries, experiencing how barriers fell to allow everyone to have a voice in the government "by the people." In colonial times, a voter was a white male at least 21, a property owner and taxpayer. When people started moving west to less aristocratic societies, poor settlers were offered the right to vote. The War of 1812 brought with it the argument "if they are good enough to fight, they are good enough to vote." By 1826, most states gave suffrage to white men 21 years of age and older.

Black men could vote in only four states by the beginning of the Civil War. With the Emancipation Proclamation, and later the full abolition of slavery, came citizenship for former slaves and with it the right of black men to vote. However, some states, especially in the South, created roadblocks to voting for blacks and poor citizens. These included poll taxes and literacy tests. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that Congressional acts, the nation's court, and public consciousness were used to lead to social change and the elimination of legal barriers to African Americans being able to vote.

During the time black citizens were first struggling to vote, women began working toward that same goal, but the vote for women would take much longer. Elizabeth Cady Stanton began the first push for women's suffrage in 1848. She was soon joined in her cause by Susan B. Anthony and others who initially worked through abolitionist and temperance movements. Some western states allowed women to vote. By the end of World War I, more than half the states allowed women to vote in some elections, but it was not until 1920 that the 19th amendment was ratified at last giving women their constitutional right to vote -- 72 years after the movement began.

It took the Vietnam War to lower the voting age to 18 so that soldiers fighting for our country were given the freedom to vote as well. Today, America has different voting challenges. Now that the barriers of race, sex, and age have been jumped, any adult over 18 can vote. But many potential voters take the right for granted and fail to exercise their power because of apathy and indifference.

Stand Up for the Right to Vote



People in the Alabama Power Voting Experience

John Adams -- 2nd President of the United States and a patriot who fought for American liberties. His wife Abigail was a supporter of women's rights.

Andrew Jackson -- 7th President of the United States. A popular hero, Andrew Jackson often spoke up for the common man.

Frederick Douglass -- a former slave. Douglass was a chief leader of the abolitionist movement, who fought to end slavery within the United States in the decades before the Civil War.

Susan B. Anthony -- a suffragist. Anthony traveled across the nation to campaign for women's vote. She worked closely with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and both championed women's labor organizations, as well as women's rights to own property and receive earnings. The inspiring Anthony, remained active until her death on March 13, 1906 at age 86.

John Lewis -- Georgia Congressman who worked as an aide to civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lewis helped promote social change through non-violent means such as sit-ins and boycotts.

John Hanson -- a Vietnam War soldier who later had a career in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Hanson embodies the concerns of 18 year olds who could serve the nation by fighting, yet did not have the right to vote.

Eva Newman -- an American from Czechoslovakia whose family knew the oppression of World War II and Communism. In her homeland, she was not allowed to go to church, and so worship is the first act the family did when they reached American shores. She is a proponent of voting in every election because the ballot box is a precious gift of liberty.

People to Know:

Lyndon B. Johnson -- 36th President of the United States. President Johnson led efforts to enact several civil rights laws. During his Administration, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed literacy tests and removed other obstacles that tended to prevent blacks from exercising their right to vote. He also struggled with the unpopularity of the Vietnam War during his presidency.

Dr. Martin Luther King -- principal leader of the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s. A clergyman and Nobel Prize winner, Dr. King advocated nonviolent protest. His challenges to segregation and racial discrimination helped convince many white Americans to support the cause of civil rights in the United States. Even after his assassination in 1968, he remained a hero in the struggle for racial justice.

Rosa Parks -- a Montgomery, Alabama seamstress who refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger in 1955, credited with the start of the modern day civil rights movement. She was arrested and fined for violating a city ordinance, but her lone act of defiance initiated the movement that ended legal segregation in America.

Words to know

Abolitionist - a person who advocated the elimination of slavery

Emancipation Proclamation - a military order issued in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln declaring that all slaves were free in states in rebellion

Suffragist - someone who wants to extend the right to vote, especially for women

